



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

## NEWS RELEASE

SNAKE RIVER BASIN OFFICE

1387 S. Vinnell Way, Room 368 • Boise, Idaho 83709

(208) 378-5243 • FAX (208) 378-5262

Contact: Jeri Wood or Meggan Laxalt (208) 378-5243

#02-10/R1#02-070

July 15, 2002

### ENDANGERED STATUS PROPOSED FOR RARE SOUTHWESTERN IDAHO PLANT

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed today to list the slickspot peppergrass (*Lepidium papilliferum*) as endangered under the Federal Endangered Species Act.

This small, rare plant occurs in sagebrush-steppe habitats in southwestern Idaho, including the Snake River Plain, Owyhee Plateau and adjacent foothills in southwestern Idaho. Biologists have documented 70 occurrences of slickspot peppergrass in Ada, Canyon, Gem, Elmore, Payette and Owyhee counties but only six of these areas are considered to be of high quality. The species is no longer found in 18 other historic occurrences. Remaining suitable habitat to support this species is less than 12,400 acres.

All remaining populations of the slickspot peppergrass are potentially vulnerable to naturally occurring events, such as wildfire, introduction of exotic species, development and other human activities.

"We welcome comments or suggestions on this proposed listing from the public, government agencies, the scientific community, private landowners, industry and all other interested parties — anyone who may have biological information or information about possible threats to the species," said Anne Badgley, Regional Director of the Service's Pacific Region. "Any final decision on whether to list this species will be based on the most accurate information."

The slickspot peppergrass is an annual or biennial plant that ranges from 4 to 12 inches in height. It has many tiny white flowers and most closely resembles the garden flower sweet alyssum. Typically, slickspot peppergrass resides in small areas known as "slick spots" that are within large sagebrush areas. Slickspots are inclusions of clay or alkaline soils within a larger matrix of saline soils. These smaller sites are often lower than the surrounding areas, so they retain water longer than the surrounding soil. These areas may be as small as a square foot, or as large as half a basketball court. They usually are surrounded by big sagebrush, native bunchgrasses, wildflowers, mosses and lichens.

Twenty-eight of the 88 known or historic slickspot peppergrass occurrences are found either wholly or partially on private lands. The remaining occurrences are found on Federal land managed by the Bureau of Land Management and the Department of Defense.

The Endangered Species Act directs Federal agencies to protect and promote the recovery of federally listed species; consequently, Federal lands provide the greatest protection for endangered and threatened plants. Where listed plants occur on Federal lands, consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service is required when projects or activities may affect the species. For private and non-Federal landowners, however, consultations come into play only in cases where activities involving plants require Federal funding or permitting.

Slickspot peppergrass was determined to be a Candidate Species in October, 1999. In November of 2001, the Service was sued by the Committee for Idaho's High Desert and Western Watersheds Project for failure to issue an emergency rule to list the plant, and also for not proceeding with a proposed rule to list it as endangered or threatened. Based upon a settlement agreement between the Service and the plaintiffs, the court signed an order for the Service to publish a proposal to list the species by July 15, 2002, in the Federal Register.

Public hearings on the proposed listing will be held in Boise on August 29, 2002 from 1-3 p.m., and from 6-8 p.m. at the AmeriTel Spectrum, 7499 W. Overland Road. Comments from interested parties must be received by September 13, 2002, [60 days from *Federal Register* publication]. Comments may also be submitted by mail to the supervisor, Snake River Basin Office, 1387 S. Vinnell Way, Room 368, Boise, Idaho 83709. Facsimile comments will be received at (208) 378-5262 and they must contain the subject line "Lepidium Comments." Electronic submission of comments are to be directed to FW1SRBOComment@fws.gov. The subject line must state "Lepidium Comments."

For more information, contact U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist, Jeri Wood of the Snake River Basin Office at 1387 S. Vinnell Way, Room 368, Boise, Idaho 83709, (208) 378-5243.

###

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses nearly 540 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas.

It also operates 70 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.